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Steps

to

Easter



DIVINE WORD PUBLICATIONS

F O R T Y
S T E P S
T O E A S T E R

by

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FORTY STEPS TO EASTER

A Practice for Each Day of Lent

Monotonous? Not this time! The steady humming of the air conditioner might irritate the cool-water diver on a day like this, but not Father Martin on a sick call! With gratifying relief he found the gracious (though visibly distressed) lady of the attractive ranch type home waiting at the door. Stepping in, he was momentarily distracted by the disconcerting sensation of suddenly sinking—sinking—sinking with each step into the depths of a newly laid Persian rug.

The candle light flickered as Mrs. Norcot led past the air conditioner, and Father recollected himself. This was a serious business—a sick call to a man near death, dying from cancer at 40. But more disturbing to the young priest was the knowledge of how unrealistically Mr. Norcot had viewed his approaching end. He had made every effort to brush away the thought of death even while it steadily, relentlessly continued to creep nearer and nearer. He had pushed ahead, establishing himself in Meadow Grove suburb, and, judging from the appearance of the place, had succeeded in an extraordinary degree.

"Father," the voice was feeble, but there was a tense challenge in it that startled the priest into complete alertness as he stepped into the sick room.

"Father, what kind of God is it that hasn't given me a chance—taking me at such a time?" and the frail victim tried to prop himself up, to rise in protest. "Like a lion at bay," thought the curate.

His eyes became two black beads as he hissed out between his labored breathing: "I didn't even get to wear out my Persian rugs! I have a closet full of suits I've barely tried on! I have plenty of everything to keep me comfortable for many years to come. Why must I die?" he sobbed rather than asked, sinking exhausted on the pillow.

An alarming attitude in a dying man? Yes, but this attachment to the present life and its goods is not a monopoly of the modern suburbanite. Throughout the na-

tion, throughout the world, throughout the ages men have lost sight of the purpose of life on earth—this pilgrimage to the Shrine of Heaven.

They behave like people so enamored of a railroad station or an airport that they refuse to proceed to the city of their destination, insisting on spending a lifetime in the waiting room.

It sounds fantastic, but conceivable. After all, what we see has more appeal than the invisible; what we experience (especially through the senses) seems to be more a reality than that which we attain in the future; physical comfort is more attractive to our fallen nature than the constant striving for the higher things of the spirit. Consequently, it is necessary for everyone to repeatedly strengthen his spiritual muscles, to concentrate more intensely, to continually renew and increase the Life of Grace—so that the things of this world will remain in their proper perspective.

As an aid in this difficult task, the Church sets aside forty days each year. Lent. During this time *all* Her Members make a concentrated effort not only to renew their own spiritual vigor but that of the whole Mystical Body. The chief means the Church proposes for the realization of this goal are three: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

Holy Mass, of course, is the best prayer. The fasting and abstinence from food are prescribed by Church Law, though any "giving up" may be called "fasting." Alms-

giving includes the sharing of money, as well as other material goods or services that require time and effort. Under that last group we might mention: compassion, sympathy, kindness, understanding, forgiveness, silence, and the practice of other social virtues which express the love we have for Christ in our neighbor.

Practices of this kind during Lent provide an opportunity to reappraise our goal and direct our course.

With this in mind the following forty steps have been prepared to provide a practice and a prayer for each day of Lent. Hence each consists of three parts: 1) a thought worth pondering on during the day, selected from the Liturgy of the day's Mass; 2) a resolution or practice flowing from this thought; and 3) a related prayer which can serve as a reminder of both, thought and resolution, if repeated frequently during the day.

The "giving up" type of practices are not frequent in this list. Rather positive action is stressed. Sundays, for this reason, while excluded from the forty days of fast by the Church, are included here for generous souls.

1. *Ash Wednesday*

Thought — "Remember, man, that you are dust and into dust you shall return." (Gen. 3:19; said by the priest while placing ashes on the head of each person.)

Practice — I shall take no offense, but treat kindly, anyone who today does

anything to me which ordinarily hurts my feelings, for I am dust and deserve no better treatment.

Prayer — Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto Thine. (500 days indulgence each time)

2. Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Thought — “Cast your care upon the Lord, and He will support you.” (Introit)

(“your care” — your fasting, mortification, or other practice; “His support” — the Heavenly Bread.)

Practice — If possible I shall receive Holy Communion today, and during the day make many Spiritual Communions.

Prayer — Suggested formula for a Spiritual Communion:

“My Jesus, I believe that You are truly present in the Blessed Sacrament. I trust You; I love You with all my heart. I wish I could receive You in Holy Communion now, but You know that I can’t, so come to me at least spiritually ... I believe that You have come to me. Stay with me and help me to remember that You are in me. Glory be to the Father, etc.” (3 years indulgence for each one)

3. Friday after Ash Wednesday

Thought — “... do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing ...” (Gospel)

Practice — I shall do three secret acts

of charity today, especially such that require my time.

Prayer — Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, furnace of divine charity, give peace to the world. (300 days indulgence each time)

4. Saturday after Ash Wednesday

Thought — “If you will cease to ... speak that which profits not, ... your light will rise up in the darkness (inspirations pouring into the soul); ... you shall be like a watered garden (bearing much fruit in the form of good works); you shall lay foundations for coming generations” by strengthening the Mystical Body. (Epistle)

Practice — I shall make at least three acts of silence today, not speaking when my words are unnecessary, even if I feel like talking.

Prayer — O God, come to my assistance: O Lord, make haste to help me. (500 days indulgence each time)

◀ First Sunday of Lent (“The Easter Time” begins, for fulfilling Easter Duty)

Thought — “Let us conduct ourselves in all circumstances as God’s ministers, in much patience ...” (Epistle)

Practice — I shall try to be very patient today, especially with those who usually get on my nerves. If I slip, I shall apologize at once.

Prayer — O God, Thou art all-powerful. Make me a saint. (500 days indulgence each time)

5. *Monday of the First Week of Lent*

Thought — “Whatsoever you have done unto the least of My brethren, you have done it unto Me.” (Gospel)

Practice — Today I shall do an act of charity for a poor or suffering person, even if I have to go out of my way to do it.

Prayer — My God, make us to be of one mind in the truth and of one heart in charity. (300 days indulgence each time)

6. *Tuesday of the First Week of Lent*

Thought — “Seek the Lord while He can be found; call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked give up his way and the unjust man his evil desires. Let him return to the Lord! Our God will have mercy on him, for He is very ready to forgive. (Epistle)

Practice — I shall try to arouse sorrow for my sins many times today by saying the act of contrition either in my own words or according to the formula, thoughtfully and sincerely.

Prayer — O God, be merciful to me, a sinner. (500 days indulgence each time)

7. *Wednesday of the First Week of Lent—Ember Wednesday*

Thought — “He arose and ate and drank, and walked in the strength of that food for forty days and forty nights.” (Epistle)

Practice — I will not complain today because I am hungry or because I don't like some food I am expected to eat. I will think of the Will of God as my food, with which I am always satisfied.

Prayer — Teach me, O Lord, to do Thy will, for Thou are my God. (500 days indulgence each time)

8. *Thursday of the First Week of Lent*

Thought — “The soul that sins, that one shall die; but if a man be just, ... and keep My commandments, he shall surely live.” (Epistle)

Practice — Today I shall avoid the occasions of sin—those people, places, things (TV, magazines, movies) which most frequently tempt me to sin.

Prayer — O Lord, throughout this day, keep us free from sin. (500 days indulgence each time)

9. *Friday of the First Week of Lent—Ember Friday*

Thought — “... when the just man turns away from his justice and commits sins, he shall die in them; when the wicked turns away from his sins, and does penance and corrects his evil ways, he shall live forever.” (Epistle)

Practice — Every time that I shall find myself either speaking or thinking of other people's faults, I shall make an act of contrition for my own.

Prayer — O Lord, remember not our former iniquities, and be merciful to

our sins for Thy Name's sake. (500 days indulgence each time)

10. Saturday of the First Week of Lent—Ember Saturday

Thought — “Pray without ceasing. In all things give thanks.” (Epistle)

Practice — Besides saying, “Thank you,” or “God bless you,” I shall also offer a prayer for everyone who shows me any kindness today.

Prayer — My God, I give You thanks for what You give and for what You take away; Thy will be done. (300 days indulgence each time)

◀ Second Sunday of Lent

Thought — “But lifting up their eyes they saw no one, but only Jesus.” (Gospel)

Practice — Today I shall try to see Jesus in every person—even in those who may be in some way unkind, because in them Jesus is present but is not allowed to act because their free will refuses to give Him this freedom.

Prayer — Lord, increase our faith. (500 days indulgence each time)

11. Monday of the Second Week of Lent

Thought — “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He.” (Gospel)

Practice — I shall accept all my sufferings today (my crosses)—great and small—without complaint and unite

them with the sufferings of Jesus on the cross (lifted up), that thus I may share in the redeeming of the world with Him.

Prayer — All for Thee, Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. (300 days indulgence each time)

12. *Tuesday of the Second Week of Lent*

Thought — “One is your Father Who is in heaven; one is your Teacher, Christ; and all you are brothers.” (Gospel)

Practice — I shall say something good today about the two people in the world that give me most trouble.

Prayer — Sweet Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us and on our erring brethren. (300 days indulgence each time)

13. *Wednesday of the Second Week of Lent*

Thought — “Whoever wishes to be the greatest among you shall be your servant, even as the Son of Man has come not to be served but to serve, and give His life as a ransom for many.” (Gospel)

Practice — Today I shall do five little services for others without attracting attention.

Prayer — Sacred Heart of Jesus, may You be known, loved, and imitated. (300 days indulgence each time)

14. *Thursday of the Second Week of Lent*

Thought — Shrouds have no pockets and bankbooks are not buried with the

dead, just as Dives left behind his table laden with good food. (Gospel)
Practice — Today I shall give away something I care for, to someone who needs it more than I do.

Prayer — My God and my All! (300 days indulgence each time)

15. Friday of the Second Week of Lent

Thought — “O Lord, deliver me from lying lip, from treacherous tongue.” (Gradual)

Practice — I shall be careful not to speak an untruth today, and say, “God bless ‘em,” when I feel envy toward anyone.

Prayer — By the sign of the Holy Cross, deliver us from our enemies, O our God. (3 years indulgence each time)

16. Saturday of the Second Week of Lent

Thought — “And he rose and went to his father and said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to the servants, ‘Fetch the best robe quickly and put it on him ... and let us eat and make merry, because this, my son, was lost and is found.’” (Gospel)

Practice — I shall make a good confession today, preparing myself for it throughout the day until the afternoon or evening by making acts of sorrow, resolution, and trust in God, my merciful Father.

Prayer — I am sorry for my sins. Grant, O God, that I may amend. I give myself wholly to Thee; for Thee I am ready to live and die. (3 years indulgence each time)

◀ *Third Sunday of Lent*

Thought — “He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me, scatters.” (Gospel) There is no such thing as a “broad-minded neutrality” in living as a true Christian.

Practice — I shall spend at least fifteen minutes today reading either the Catechism or a Religion book or the question-and-answer section of a Catholic newspaper or magazine to learn the Catholic position on topics of present-day interest so that I won’t have to be afraid to speak up during a discussion of the subjects.

Prayer — Christ Jesus, be Thou my Helper and my Redeemer. (300 days indulgence each time)

17. *Monday of the Third Week of Lent*

Thought — “‘No prophet is acceptable in his own country,’ . . . and they arose and put Him out of the town, and led Him to the brow of the hill . . . that they might throw Him down headlong.” (Gospel)

Practice — I shall say something nice today either *to* or *about* every member of my family, and be especially kind to those I work with.

Prayer — Sacred Heart of Jesus, protect our families. (300 days indulgence each time)

18. *Tuesday of the Third Week of Lent*

Thought — “How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” asked Peter. Jesus answered, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.” (that is, without limit)

Practice — Today I shall cancel ALL grudges, including those which are hanging over from a distant past.

Prayer — Our Father . . . forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

19. *Wednesday of the Third Week of Lent*

Thought — “What goes into the mouth does not defile (make unclean) a man, but that which comes out of the mouth—evil thoughts, lies, blasphemes, slanders, cursing, swearing—these make a man unclean; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.” (Gospel)

Practice — Today I will check on myself: have I disliked people because they are untidy (dirty or sloppy), and liked the “slick” and well-dressed (with a convertible) although they may in reality be “clean” cheats? Or maybe I’m one myself—paying more attention to my external appearance than to the condition of my soul.

Prayer — Grant, O blessed Joseph, that, ever secure under thy protection, we may pass our lives without guilt. (300 days indulgence each time)

20. *Thursday of the Third Week of Lent*

Thought — “Now when the sun was setting, all who had persons sick with various diseases brought them to Him, and He laid His hands upon each one of them and cured them, and devils also came forth from many . . .”
(Gospel)

Practice — Today I shall give personal attention to anyone in need whom I can help, instead of leaving it to someone else, or “getting rid” of him as fast as I can.

Prayer — Be pleased, O God, to rescue me; O Lord, make haste to help me!
(500 days indulgence each time)

21. *Friday of the Third Week of Lent*

Thought — “The woman said to Him, ‘Sir, give me this water that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.’”
(Gospel)

Practice — Today I shall not drink anything between meals, not even water, and offer it to obtain strength for some person I know who gets drunk often or occasionally, thus losing the “Living Water” of sanctifying grace by committing sin.

Prayer — Heart of Jesus, grant that I may love Thee and cause Thee to be

loved. (300 days indulgence each time)

22. Saturday of the Third Week of Lent
Thought — “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to cast a stone at her.” (Gospel)

Practice — I will not judge anybody today. If a fault is very obvious, I shall at least try to excuse the intention or plead ignorance on the part of the offender.

Prayer — Divine Heart of Jesus, convert sinners, save the dying, set free the holy souls in purgatory. (300 days indulgence each time)

◀ *Fourth Sunday of Lent—Laetare*

Thought — “Gather up the fragments that are left over, lest they be wasted.” (Gospel)

Practice — I will be careful not to waste anything today, especially food and time.

Prayer — Abide with me, Lord, be Thou my true joy. (300 days indulgence each time)

23. Monday of the Fourth Week of Lent

Thought — “Take these things away and do not make the house of My Father a house of business.” (Gospel)

Practice — Today when I pray I shall put aside all worries and trust in God so that my mind won’t be cluttered up with all kinds of distractions, as the temple was desecrated by the

presence of all kinds of things, for my soul is also the Temple of God.

Prayer — Heart of Jesus, I put my trust in Thee! (300 days indulgence each time)

24. *Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Lent*

Thought — “They wanted, therefore, to seize Him, but no one laid hands on Him because His hour had not yet come.” (Gospel)

Practice — I shall do what I think is right every moment of the day without thinking of what others will say about me or what they might do to me because of it.

Prayer — O Cross, my only hope, I salute thee. (500 days indulgence each time)

25. *Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Lent*

Thought — “I went and washed and I see.” (Gospel)

Practice — Today every time I make a slip and hurt somebody, I shall immediately apologize, so that I will be able to face the truth about myself even when it hurts—see myself as others see me.

Prayer — Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me. (500 days indulgence each time)

26. *Thursday of the Fourth Week of Lent*

Thought — Jesus said to the mother, “Weep not.” (Gospel)

Practice — Today I shall cheer up at

least three people who are sad or disappointed.

Prayer — Mother of love, of sorrow, and of mercy, pray for us. (300 days indulgence each time)

27. Friday of the Fourth Week of Lent

Thought — “Let us also go that we may die with Him.” (Gospel)

Practice — I will offer at least five mortifications today (like not watching TV or smoking or eating what I like) in union with the sufferings of Jesus, so that my selfishness may die and my love grow.

Prayer — Sacred Heart of Jesus, I believe in Thy love for me. (300 days indulgence each time)

28. Saturday of the Fourth Week of Lent

Thought — “Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And even if she should forget, yet I will not forget you.” (Epistle)

Practice — When anything goes wrong today, instead of worrying or grumbling about it, I shall at once trustfully ask God for help.

Prayer — Sacred Heart of Jesus, I believe in Thy love for me. (300 days indulgence each time)

◀ Passion Sunday

Thought — “They took up stones to cast at Him, but Jesus hid Himself,

and went out of the temple.”
(Gospel)

Practice — I will not quarrel or justify myself today when I am accused of anything, even if I am in the right, but quietly step aside as Jesus did.

Prayer — Deliver me from my enemies, O God. (500 days indulgence each time)

29. Monday in Passion Week

Thought — “And God saw their works, that they had turned from their evil way; and the Lord our God had mercy upon His people.” (Epistle)

Practice — Today I shall go out of my way to speak to at least two people whom I usually avoid for some reason, and offer this as a penance for my sins.

Prayer — Jesus, for love of Thee, with Thee, and for Thee. (300 days indulgence each time)

30. Tuesday in Passion Week

Thought — “And Habacuc cried, saying, ‘O Daniel, servant of God, take the dinner that God has sent you.’ Daniel said, ‘You have remembered me, O God, and You have not forsaken those who love You.’ And Daniel rose and ate.” (Epistle)

Practice — Today I shall give either food or clothing (or whatever I can) to someone in need.

Prayer — Jesus, my God, I love Thee above all things. (300 days indulgence each time)

31. Wednesday in Passion Week

Thought — “Keep My laws, for I am your God.” (Epistle)

Practice — Today I shall accurately observe all rules laid down by those over me even if I don’t like them, remembering that all authority comes from God.

Prayer — We pray Thee, come to the aid of Thy servants, whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy Precious Blood. (300 days indulgence each time)

32. Thursday in Passion Week

Thought — “I say to you, her sins, many as they are, are forgiven her, because she has loved much. But he to whom less is forgiven loves less.” (Gospel)

Practice — I shall show my love for God today by being very courteous to my neighbor—everyone I contact today—as Magdalen showed her love by washing Jesus’ feet.

Prayer — O my God, I love Thee with my whole heart and soul, because Thou art the Infinite Good; and I love my neighbor as myself for the love of Thee. (3 years indulgence each time)

33. Friday in Passion Week—Commemoration of the Sorrowful Mother

Thought — “Happy the Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which without dying, earned the palm of martyrdom beneath the cross of Our Lord.” (Communion Verse)

Practice — Today in honor of the Mother of God, I shall be very kind to all the mothers I meet or work with.

Prayer — Holy Mother, pierce me through; in my heart each wound renew of my Savior crucified. (500 days indulgence each time)

34. Saturday in Passion Week

Thought — “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”
(Gospel)

Practice — Today whenever I begin a new piece of work or move from one place to another, I shall recall that all things pass away, and I shall look forward to seeing Jesus Who is waiting for me at the “end of the road.”

Prayer — Remain with me, O Lord; be Thou my true joy. (300 days indulgence each time)

►Palm Sunday

Thought — “The multitude goes forth to meet the Redeemer with flowers and palms, and pays the homage due to a triumphant Conqueror; the Gentiles proclaim the Son of God; and their voices thunder through the skies in praise of Christ: Hosanna!”
(First Antiphon during the Procession of Palms)

Practice — I shall go to church today for the Mass at which the palms are blest and bring one home and place it behind a crucifix or sacred picture on the wall.

Prayer — Blessed is he who comes in the Name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. (500 days indulgence if said after the Consecration in the Mass)

35. *Monday in Holy Week*

Thought — Judas Iscariot, who was about to betray Him, said, "Why wasn't this ointment sold for three hundred denarii, and given to the poor?" Now he said this, not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief. (Gospel)

Practice — Today I will not criticize others' actions, even if I think I know better ways of doing the same things.

Prayer — Heart of Jesus, I love Thee. Convert all poor blasphemers. (300 days indulgence each time)

36. *Tuesday in Holy Week*

Thought — At that moment a cock crowed a second time, and Peter remembered the word that Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice, you will deny Me three times," and he began to weep. (Passion according to St. Mark, read in today's Mass)

Practice — Today I shall often remember my sins with sorrow, because in committing them I acted like Peter, as if I didn't know Jesus.

Prayer — O Jesus, hide me within Thy wounds. (300 days indulgence each time)

37. Wednesday in Holy Week

Thought — Judas, one of the Twelve, was going before them (the crowd), and he drew near Jesus to kiss Him. But Jesus said to him, "Judas, do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" (Passion according to St. Luke)

Practice — Today I shall not pretend nor be a hypocrite, but be sincere and truthful.

Prayer — Sacred Heart of Jesus, I give myself to You through Mary. (300 days indulgence each time)

38. Holy Thursday

Thought — "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another, as I have loved you," says the Lord. (First Antiphon during the washing of the feet)

Practice — I shall receive Holy Communion at the evening Mass, and in preparation, I shall be charitable in thought, word, and act all day, trying not to hurt anybody, and forgiving everybody readily.

Prayer — O Sacrament most holy, O Sacrament Divine; all praise and all thanksgiving be every moment Thine. (300 days indulgence each time)

39. Good Friday

Thought — "And bowing His head, He gave up His Spirit." (Passion according to St. John)

Practice — I shall keep perfect silence today from 12 o'clock at noon to 3:00 P.M., thinking as much as possible about the dreadful, yet glorious, sufferings of Jesus which redeemed me.

Prayer — We adore Thee, O Christ, and we bless Thee, because by Thy Holy Cross Thou hast redeemed the world.
(3 years indulgence each time)

40. *Holy Saturday*

Thought — "This is the night in which, destroying the chains of death, Christ arose victorious from the grave." (Pascal Proclamation)

Practice — I shall be very helpful to everyone today, without complaining how much there is to do, with the intention that I am preparing everything for Jesus Who will rise tonight.

Prayer — Come, Lord, and tarry not.
(500 days indulgence each time)

Check Up

1. Am I richer in God's Life—a better person—than I was at the beginning of Lent?
2. How successful was I in following Jesus through the forty steps?
(Suggestion: Save your booklet and try to do as well or better next year.)
3. Have I succeeded in becoming aware that Heaven is my Goal and the material things of this world only the means for reaching it?

In the Offertory of my Easter Mass I shall offer all my practices and prayers of the 40 days of Lent to the Risen Savior.

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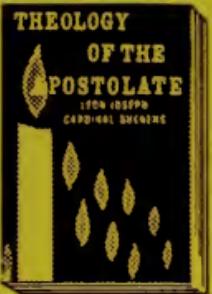
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